

LETTERS  
ON  
NONCONFORMITY,

By JOHN MARTIN.

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LOVE THE TRUTH AND PEACE.

ZACH. viii. 19.

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LONDON:

Printed by J. BARFIELD, Wardour-Street, Soho.

PUBLISHED FOR

JOHN MARTIN, Junior, Great Russel-Street, Bedford-Square.

AND SOLD BY

W. BUTTON, Paternoster-Row; T. GARDINER, Princes-Street,  
Cavendish-Square; and J. MURRAY, Princes-Street, Soho.

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1800.

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PRICE ONE SHILLING.



## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE wisdom that is from above is without partiality, and without hypocrisy. It is so in every age and nation; but such wisdom is often less esteemed in this world, than that which is full of duplicity, envy, and strife. Be it so; heavenly wisdom is justified of all her children, and will be victorious.

The Letters here published, were written under that persuasion; in which, therefore, the favor of no man is improperly courted, nor is the condition of any man treated with contempt. If they contain any thing that cannot be defended, on conviction, it shall be given up; but if the writer of them hath not missed his way as a Christian, the invectives of the partial and illiberal, will not disturb his quiet. He may not live to see much good done by this *publication*, but if a better and more impartial period be approaching, he flattereth himself it will not be forgotten.

TO promote properly the good of Society, is unspeakably more important, than to gratify, on any pretence, the vanity of a Sect. The first, requireth those talents and that kind of temper which cannot be despised; the second, discovereth those artifices, and produceth that sort of behaviour, which cannot, by men of understanding, be admired. In the former pursuit, a man feeleth himself to be a man, and walketh uprightly; unincumbered and undaunted. In the latter, a man seemeth to be unman'd, and to have forgotten his destination; his mind, therefore, is contracted, his path crooked, and, almost at every step, he is either deluded or depressed. In this publication, the good of Society, as subordinate to the glory of God, hath been preferred to every private attachment, and to every local connection. It should be so; for, if all christians have both their defects and excesses, it is their duty to study, confess, and bewail their own imperfections, instead of giving, *gratis*, exaggerated accounts of their neighbours. This duty hath here been regarded; and should the sentiments contained in these Letters be understood and approved, one may venture to assert, that Dissenters will not ENVY Churchmen, and that Churchmen will not vex Dissenters.



LETTERS



LETTERS  
ON  
NONCONFORMITY,

TO  
*JOHN WELLAND, Esq.*

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LETTER I.

DEAR SIR,

THAT which you feared hath come to pass ;  
for several dissenting ministers in London, have  
been seriously alarmed by the multiplied RE-  
PORTS of an intended persecution. Strange,  
that they who allow we have deserved the worst  
of chastisements, should so soon forget their  
public confessions ; and, as the shadow of afflic-  
tion is supposed to approach, talk loudly, not  
of deserved chastisements, but of undeserved  
persecution.

B

That

That the present parliament intend to treat protestant dissenters with rigor, is not credible. Such a measure in them would be impolitic, and every insinuation of that sort by us would be imprudent.

Even TORIES, when in power, have said,  
 “ Where sects are tolerated in a state, it is fit they should enjoy a full liberty of conscience, and every other privilege of free born subjects, TO WHICH NO POWER IS ANNEXED.”\*

But if by a full liberty of conscience, some dissenters dream of dominion; if by every other privilege of free-born subjects, they include the possession of those privileges to which revenue and power are annexed, they will find neither sensible TORIES nor WHIGS in the church of England, disposed to applaud their piety; much less inclined to gratify their ambition. Is it not absurd, that they who find so much fault with the LITURGY of the church, and who rail against EPISCOPACY, should expect from churchmen

\* Swift's Works, vol. iii. p. 81.

churchmen temporal promotion? But they who have a high opinion of their own piety and wit, often fall into such mistakes as men of common sense avoid.

We are seldom pleased with the disengenuous behaviour of those we esteem. Such incongruity hath often hurt my feelings; and of late, some gentlemen of my acquaintance, have not pleased me by their partial and ungenerous remarks on the origin and grounds of non-conformity. They are of note in their own connections, and, in many things, worthy of regard. But no degree of reputation can sanction error; and as the errors of such men are more hurtful than the mistakes of meaner mortals, in my opinion they should be examined with care, and noticed with becoming resolution. In matters of controversy, he that is blessed as Levi was, will endeavor to act as Levi did when he said unto his father and to his mother, "I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children."\*

B 2

Musing

\* Deut. xxxiii. 9.

Musing on these things, I wish to draw up a more impartial and ingenuous account of the origin and grounds of nonconformity, than I have yet seen; such an account, that, if published, may incline honest churchmen and dissenters, not to form a venal coalition, but to behave respectfully to each other upon all occasions. This, however, is a task I cannot fulfil without your assistance; and to obtain that favor is the purport of this letter.

Some, when they hear of my design, will teem with conjectures, and abound in misconstructions. But you, and some others whom I could wish to please, will judge better of this business; because you and they know, that if I attempt to perform this self-imposed task, it will be from a benevolent intention.

Before I conclude, permit me to say, that the itch of writing is neither so common, nor so hurtful, as the rage of censure.

“ Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss.”

In what house, and in what shape, are not  
ill-



ill-judging critics to be found? Who can surmount their censures? He that knoweth on what they are founded, and why they are published. In proportion, therefore, as I relish your remarks, and regard your advice, the impotent invectives of such critics will not disturb my peace.

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LETTER II.

DEAR SIR,

I THANK you heartily, for your promised assistance, and reasonable cautions: they encourage me to proceed.

What if I were to begin my intended Essay on Nonconformity, by observing, that nonconformity to the church of England, may be considered

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considered as reasonable, unreasonable, and doubtful? That considered as reasonable, it is right, and may, and will be defended; that considered as unreasonable, so far as that can be proved, it is wrong, and indefensible; that considered as doubtful, if any part of it be such, it should not be rated by us at more than its value, nor should we be surprized if some of our opponents should say, that part is of no value at all.—But may I speak of these things so plainly? Or must I be very cautious in making concessions?

I cannot but wish some ministers would often ask themselves, Why they dissented from the established church. Was it to obtain that consequence, or that stipend, among nonconformists, they could not expect in the church of England? Or, (tolerated, protected, and assisted, as dissenting ministers<sup>are</sup>,) Was it to edify themselves and their hearers peaceably, and to be such examples of faith and patience, of piety and benevolence, that sensible churchmen might observe with pleasure, and applaud without regret?—Such questions have been of  
service



service to myself, and might be of use to other ministers; but may we always recommend to others what has been beneficial to ourselves?

It is said, before the civil war in 1641, dissenters were called PURITANS. Of those puritans there were four sorts: doctrinal, practical, disciplinarian, and political. The first sort, were zealously attached to calvinism. The second, were men of severe morals. The third, aimed to make scripture the rule of reformation. The fourth, endeavoured to abridge prerogative, and to extend popular liberty.\*

After the civil war, dissenters were called NONCONFORMISTS. At present, these may be considered as internal and external.—Among the internal nonconformists to the church of England, may be reckoned, methodists of ill-agreeing creeds, and those unprincipled clergymen, that applaud and propagate doctrines, quite inconsistent with several of those articles, they

\* Robinson's Lectures, p. 14.

they promised, on oath, to defend.—Among the external nonconformists, may be reckoned those that attend the service of no other persuasion, as Atheists, Deists, and, one knows not how many sorts of sceptical Philosophers besides ; and such nonconformists as absent themselves from the church of England on the plea of conscience. Of this sort, are Roman Catholics, the Members of the Church of Scotland, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, Quakers, Moravians, and other dissenting societies of which I have heard, but know not by what name they would choose to be described.

As if all this was not enough, an immense addition to dissenters hath lately been the subject of conversation. For, a methodist preacher hath threatened in print, whom it may concern, that if the privileges which he and his friends have long enjoyed, should be diminished by parliament, they shall be reduced to the necessity of calling themselves PROTESTANT DISSENTERS. But, as this good gentleman and his numerous friends, seem to be shocked at the thought of being compelled to be DISSENTERS, surely,

surely, our legislators will not compel more than HALF A MILLION of his Majesty's professedly loyal subjects, to call themselves Protestant Dissenters.

Having mentioned more sorts of nonconformists than was once intended, inform me, how many of them should be introduced into my Essay, and in what manner they should be arranged.

## LETTER III.

DEAR SIR,

**I** NOW venture to lay before you, some of my thoughts on the ORIGIN of nonconformity.

The source of nonconformity to the church of England, undoubtedly was, such a disagreement

ment between some of the contending members of that church, that inclined, or constrained the minority of those disputants to leave it, in order to worship God more acceptably, as they supposed, than if they had quietly submitted to her decisions. But this point is not so well settled as some imagine.

It is said, indeed, that the first separation from the church of England, was NOT voluntary, but of NECESSITY, and that our predecessors were cast out of the church by her impositions, and excluded by her canons. This language, however, is sometimes forgotten, and sometimes so altered, that it is not easy to make a fair report of the fact. But these things cannot affect us, as some others. We are not the children of dissenters. The prejudices of our parents ran in another channel; and probably, on that account, we have a greater regard for the peace and welfare of the church of England, than the natural posterity of dissenters commonly possess.

If, by the origin of nonconformity, we speak  
of



of its FIRST appearance in this country, THAT is of ancient date ; for, there have been non-conformists to the church of England, almost as early as its own existence. Every national church hath met with similar trials ; and the unity and harmony of congregational churches, have not been so complete, as some advocates for that order have represented.

The congregational order, in my opinion, is best adapted to make, and preserve, a proper distinction between the churches of Christ and the world, in every possible situation. It is, therefore, strongly recommended to our notice in the new Testament. Yet, in most of the congregational churches mentioned in that sacred book, there were scandalous divisions and contentions ; and such stumbling blocks in congregational churches, yet abound.

In the reigns of Henry the Eighth, Edward the Sixth, Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, James the First, and Charles the First, it is allowed, that nonconformists were not so well distinguished, nor so much united, as in the reign of Charles the Second. In his licentious

days, " It was resolved to maintain conformity to the height, and to put lecturers in the same condition with the incumbents, as to oaths and subscriptions; and to oblige all persons to subscribe an unfeigned assent and consent to all and every particular, contained and prescribed in the book of Common Prayer."\*

These rigorous steps to promote apparent uniformity among churchmen, produced more real union between dissenters than they had before enjoyed. But that so much gaiety and severity should meet together, as frequently did meet in the reign of Charles the Second, may now seem incredible; if, however, the language of the Bartholomew Act, and the rigor of its execution, be compared with the manners of HIS court, it will be evident, that the gay and voluptuous know how to be cruel, and to think themselves wise and prudent, not only when they are very silly, but when they are dreadfully severe.

Great hardships were then to be endured by  
non-

\* Burnet's History of his own Time, vol. i. p. 255.

nonconformists; and were endured by many of them, in a manner much to their credit. But that some of the ejected ministers would have left their livings, had they not vainly fancied they were of necessity, soon to be-restored, is not believed; and they who are best acquainted with the history of those times, are of opinion that those gentlemen were disappointed.

In the following inglorious and oppressive reign of James the Second, but few, whether they were churchmen, or dissenters, walked uprightly. Most of them were so wedded to their own separate emoluments, that the inseparable interests of revealed religion and of sound morality, were awfully neglected. Undoubtedly there were exceptions; and those exceptions were the more pleasing, since it is always a double honor to behave well in evil times, and in unpromising situations. What Bishop Burnet therefore says of Baptists in those evil days, is much to their honor. His words are, "The Anabaptists were generally men of virtue, and of an universal charity: and, as they were far from being in any treating  
terms



terms with the church of England, so nothing but an universal toleration, could make them capable of favor or employments."\* Had this good Bishop been less fond than he some times was of TREATING TERMS, in order to obtain favor and employment, that would have been to his honor; and had he been aware that by calling us ANABAPTISTS, he did in effect allow that our baptism is real baptism, probably, he would not have made use of that ambiguous and offensive term.

Of that turbulent period to which the hypocrisy and tyranny of Oliver Cromwell gave existence, I am resolved to say as little as possible; and, unless it were in my power to say such things as might induce some dissenters honestly to confess and bewail the disloyalty of their predecessors, would it not be best to adhere to that resolution?

Now, Sir, from what is thus submitted to your notice, How far should I go back when  
I am

\* Burnet's History of his own Time, vol. ii. p. 407.



I am to speak of the origin of nonconformity in my Essay?—Some prefer the year 1662, because it gave birth to the Bartholomew Act, and because they say, at that period nonconformists were more settled and united than in former days. Others contend, that the settlement and union of the Presbyterians and Independents did not take place “till after a most lamentable schism of above forty years continuance.” According to this account,\* the union between them was not adjusted till the year 1690, being more than a year after the Revolution.

Though I wish for your opinion on this subject, it would ill-become me to be anxious about any particular date. For, it is absurd to suppose, that any man's being a member of the church of England, or a dissenter from it, is essential to his being such a Christian as is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

LETTER

\* See Gray's Hudibras, Preface, p. xii.

LETTER IV.

DEAR SIR,

THE author of the Critical History of England, who was a churchman, says, " It is the general opinion of the common people of our church, that there is no other protestant church in the world; but that all Christendom besides, is made up of papists and schismatics. This is zealously inculcated by the inferior clergy; and I have the charity to think many of them are so ignorant as to know no better, and to believe it."

" Upon this foot it is, that the kirk of Scotland, the churches of Holland, Germany, Geneva, Swisserland, the Hugonots, &c. consisting of many millions of souls more than we have in England, are entirely unknown to them, or abhorred as in a schism."

" Upon this foot it is, that the word ORTHO-  
DOX

dox is monopolized, and has relation only to the christians in England, who have the benefit of the establishment. By which establishment the clergy have many temporal emoluments, which are made a part of the church, and consequently not to be separated without sacrilege."

"It is no wonder, therefore," continues the same author, "that there has been great opposition to any schemes which would lessen those emoluments, either in revenue or dignity. No wonder that men who have had these temporals most at heart, have been jealous of losing them, and earnest in their endeavour to maintain them, which has occasioned those rigors and severities that their opponents call persecution."\*

Such concessions from churchmen, on church concerns, merit our attention; and when we speak of improper behaviour in dissenters, may we have courage to follow such examples.

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As

\* Crit. History of England, p. 328, 329.

As there must be a continued succession of churchmen and dissenters in this country, every attempt to form a closer union between them, than a good conscience on both sides, can admit, will be unsuccessful, or inglorious. Who now reads the Savoy Conference? Who would now listen to GUNNING and BAXTER on the critical subject of comprehension?—Depend upon it, when dissenters are anxious to promote compromising schemes, churchmen understand their meaning.

Every intelligent and honest dissenter, must be of opinion, that upon the whole, he hath chosen the better part, whatever may be the external consequences of his dissent from the church of England. This thought, while unimpaired, giveth quiet to his mind, and addeth dignity to his steps. It preserveth him from envy, and keepeth him at a becoming distance from a temporising disposition. Such conduct I have often admired in you, and long since endeavoured to follow. Could some people believe this, they would perceive my general conduct hath been more consistent than they have



have surmised. But, whatever may be the suspicions, even of our friends, an honest man, will not, on that account, change his behaviour.

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LETTER V.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING given you my opinion of the ORIGIN of nonconformity, the GROUNDS of our dissent from the church of England will be the subject of this letter.

On separation in general it hath been said,  
“ If within the church, particular persons be apparently such, as cannot otherwise be reformed, the rule of apostolical judgment is this ; SEPARATE THEM FROM AMONG YOU : if whole assemblies, this ; SEPARATE YOURSELVES FROM AMONG THEM : for what society hath light with

darkness?"\*—This is good advice; but how to act upon it properly, upon all occasions, is more difficult than many have supposed.

As to separation from the church of England, the difficulty hath varied with the period in which any dissented from it, and the temper she was disposed to indulge at that period. In the reign of Ethelbert, the church of England submitted herself to the Roman Pontiff. In the reign of Henry the Eighth, it became protestant. In the reign of Edward the Sixth, it much better deserved that honorable name. When Queen Mary ascended the throne, popery again prevailed in the church of England; but in the reign of Elizabeth, it was established by parliament, on those protestant principles, and in that kind of form and order which the great body of the nation then approved, and continueth to approve.

Now, when I treat upon the grounds of nonconformity, how far would you have me go

\* Hooker's Works, vol. iii. p. 431, 432.

go back? Shall I begin with Henry the Eighth, and end with the death of Queen Anne? Or continue the account to a much later period; and remark, as I proceed, what different pleas have been urged for nonconformity; and how far protestant nonconformists were, however, in some things agreed? If you approve of this extended plan, let me know, how I am to manage those Acts of Parliament which must be consulted. Am I to quote the most offensive clauses of those Acts, as the manner of some is, without paying any attention to the history of those times? Or, may I venture to state every fact I am able to discover, just as it appears to myself, and leave the reader, as if he was a juryman, to form his own opinion of my statement?

Another difficulty occurs. When I meet with learned authors who have written strongly against nonconformity, should I speak as impartially as I can of their labors, or must I insinuate they have long since been answered, and are not worthy of our attention?

For

For instance ; may I say, that in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, lived RICHARD HOOKER, a man whose memory will be revered by men of understanding, as long as good sense and good learning will be admired ? May I say, that those who cannot always think with him, will often think of him with pleasure ? May I say, some will do this who are dissenters ; and, that such dissenters, like Abraham and Lot, Paul and Barnabas, will love those from whom they separate, to avoid contention, and gladly manifest it upon every trying occasion ? Or, must I asperse the character of HOOKER, because he wrote in favor of EPISCOPACY, and was, as I really think he was, too fond of a splendid hierarchy on earth ; though he himself was content with a very humble station in the established church ?

Further ; would you have me, in any part of my Essay, compare the grounds of our dissent from the church of England, with the arguments used by that church, when she herself dissented from the church of Rome ?

Unless



Unless you object, I intend, in my Essay, to consider Protestant Dissenters as temperate, intemperate, and others, as being inattentive to the controversy between us and the church of England. By the temperate, I mean those who have studied the subject of nonconformity carefully, as lovers of truth and peace. By the intemperate, I mean those who have given indeed much attention to the same subject, but alas! under the dominion of a sectarian temper. By the inattentive, I mean those amongst us, who have neither leisure, nor inclination, to look into this controversy, but follow, in christian simplicity, those, who in matters of greater importance, are of use to their edification.

If you approve of this division, I intend to say, that the grounds of dissent among temperate and orthodox dissenters are, a steady regard for those doctrines, which are professedly the doctrines of the church of England, but which are not often explained, defended, and applied in that church as formerly they were; and also, a becoming regard for that kind of  
order

order and discipline, which they believe no national church is heartily disposed to admire. Of intemperate dissenters, if orthodox, I intend to say, that the grounds of their dissent are, not only what hath been mentioned, but with this addition, they believe that the church of England is not a church of Christ.—As to intemperate dissenters who are NOT orthodox, but equally severe against the church of England, of them I shall take but little notice; because where sound doctrine is rejected, the things that become it will not be esteemed.—Lastly, in respect of those who have neither leisure, nor inclination to study this controversy, all I can say is, I heartily wish they may be much better employed.

No sensible and candid clergyman will be disposed to make an improper use of these remarks; because he knoweth that not only temperate and intemperate churchmen, but the uninstructed also in this controversy, are the objects of his ministry; and that among the latter, are those that deserve his respectful attention.

LETTER

## LETTER VI.

DEAR SIR,

AFTER all, would it not be best to mention what hath been said on the grounds of nonconformity in the Nonconformists Memorial, and afterwards add what may be necessary to complete my plan?

In the introduction of that work, and under this article, "The Grounds of the Nonconformity of the ejected Ministers," are these words:

"It is not to be supposed that two thousand men should be all of a mind. Among the excluded ministers there was a diversity of sentiments, so that the grounds of their nonconformity were different. The following abstract contains the reasons of those who were the most moderate, and least fond of separation,

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and which, for the most part, were common to them all."

IV  
THAT ABSTRACT ABRIDGED.

" I. They were required, by the Act of Uniformity, to be re-ordained, if not episcopally ordained before."

" II. They were required to declare their unfeigned assent and consent to all, and every thing contained and prescribed in and by the book, intituled, The Book of Common Prayer, &c. And they must also, *ex animo*, subscribe these words: that the Book of Common Prayer, and of ordaining bishops, priests and deacons, containeth in it nothing contrary to the word of God; and that it may be lawfully used: and that they themselves would use the form in the said books prescribed in public prayer, and administration of the sacraments, and NO OTHER."

" III. They were also required, by the Act of Uniformity, to take the oath of canonical obedience,



obedience, and swear subjection to their ordinary, according to the canons of the church."

" IV. They were also required, by the Act of Uniformity, to abjure the SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT, in these words: I, A. B. do declare, that I do hold there lies no obligation upon me, or any other person, from the oath commonly called, The solemn League and Covenant, to endeavour any change or alteration of government, either in church or state; and that the same was in itself an unlawful oath, and imposed upon the subjects of this realm, against the known laws and liberties of this kingdom."

" V. Besides the oath of allegiance and supremacy, all in holy orders were, by the Act of Uniformity, obliged to subscribe this political declaration: I, A. B. do declare, that it is not lawful, upon any pretence whatsoever, to take arms against the King; and that I do abhor that traiterous position of taking arms by

his authority against his person, or against those that are commissioned by him."\*

How far any of these grounds of nonconformity, have been removed or altered, by the Revolution, and by subsequent events, should be dispassionately considered; but, as if none of these things were sufficient to justify a peaceable dissent from the established church, some think it best to say, that the church of England is not a church of Christ; and to give their willing hearers a long list of reasons for that intemperate assertion. Their end is obvious; but not excellent. But, of this irritating affirmation, you may expect some additional remarks in my next letter.

## LETTER

\* Noncon's Mem. Introd. p. 37, 49.

## LETTER VII.

DEAR SIR,

OF late, it has been too much the fashion to speak slightly of the REFORMATION. According to some, it is not only defective, but hardly worth their notice. Our ancestors formed a very different notion of it, and well they might. For before that period, and since, it is well known, the church of Rome maintained, “ That the same credit and reverence that we give to the scriptures of God, ought also to be given to unwritten verities; that the Pope is supreme head ministerial over the universal church militant; that the bread in the Eucharist is transubstantiated into Christ; that it is to be adored, and to be offered up unto God, as a sacrifice propitiatory for quick and dead; that images are to be worshipped; saints to be called upon as intercessors, and such like.”\*

\* Hooker's Works, vol. iii. p. 444.

These and other absurd sentiments were renounced by the church of England at the Reformation; but this seemeth to be unknown, or forgotten, by some dissenters; and, in their company, one would imagine, that to speak rudely of the church of England, was a becoming test of nonconformity-

It is remarkable, that though certain dissenters will not admit that the church of England is a church of Christ, some, whose memories they revere, have long since allowed that even the church of Rome, with all her errors, had not absolutely forfeited her right to that title. CALVIN himself was of that opinion. His testimony is thus given: "I suppose, that in the Papacy some church remaineth; a church crazed, or, if you will, broken quite in pieces, forlorn, mis-shapen, yet some church:" his reason is this, "ANTICHRIST MUST SIT IN THE TEMPLE OF GOD."\*

But in all ages party prejudice hath been  
too

\* Hooker's Works, vol. iii. p. 470.



too conspicuous; and in the present, that bigotted disposition is far from being suppressed. In what an uncharitable manner have some high churchmen lately written against dissenters? from whom, in truth, they have had measure for measure, with equal animosity.

In the New Testament, however, we find a considerable difference between those that were without the visible church of Christ, and those that were within it; between those that professed to believe in our Lord, and those that avowedly rejected the gospel of God. Under the Old Testament, also, there was much the same difference between Samaria and Jerusalem; between them that bowed their knees to Baal, and those who professed to worship the God of Judah.

“ Samaria, compared with Jerusalem, is termed **AHOLATH**, a church or tabernacle of her own; contrarywise, Jerusalem, is called **AHOLIBATH**, the resting place of the Lord: so, whatsoever we term the church of Rome, when we compare her with **REFORMED CHURCHES**,  
still

still we put a difference, as THEN between Babylon and Samaria, so NOW between Rome and the Heathenish assemblies.”\*

The church of Laodicea, though extremely corrupt, was addressed by him who is the AMEN, the faithful and true witness as a Christian church, and counselled to buy of him gold tried in the fire, that she might be rich; white raiment that she might be clothed, and eye salve that she might see. But what must those dissenters think of our Lord's conduct to the church of Laodicea, who will not admit that the church of England is a church of Christ? If the church of England, hath built on the true foundation that sort of wood, hay, stubble, which the fire of truth will destroy, must the gold, silver, and precious stones, be destroyed also, and the whole fabric be pulled down because it is not erected to our taste?—A proud opinion that the TRUE sense of scripture, and OUR sense of scripture is EXACTLY the same, seemeth to be the root of such violent proceedings; and

and this intoxicating root may be found among enthusiasts of all persuasions.

It is said, " In a great house, there are not only vessels of gold, and of silver, but also of wood, and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."\*

By this great house, we must understand the visible church of Christ in this world, or the world itself. If the latter, I am deceived; if the former, then we should not only distinguish between the church and the world, but also, between those in the visible church, who say they are christians and are not, and those that really are " vessels unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

The most eminent ministers in the church  
F of

\* 2 Tim. ii. 20, 21.

of England, are well acquainted with these distinctions; and Mr. HOOKER, a man highly esteemed by them, wrote well on this subject, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Let me avail myself of some of his judicious remarks.

“ That church of Christ, which we properly term his body MYSTICAL, can be but ONE; neither can THAT ONE be sensibly discerned by any man, inasmuch as the parts thereof are some in Heaven already with Christ, and the rest that are on earth, (albeit their natural persons be VISIBLE,) we do not discern under this property whereby they are truly and infallibly of that (mystical) body.”

“ When we read of any duty which the church of God is bound unto, the church whom THIS doth concern, is a SENSIBLE KNOWN COMPANY. And this VISIBLE church, in like sort, is but ONE, continued from the first beginning of the world to the last end.. Which company being divided into two moieties, the one before, the other since the coming of Christ, that part which since the coming of Christ,



Christ, partly hath embraced, and partly shall hereafter embrace, the christian religion, we term, as by a more proper name, the church of Christ.\*

So much for Mr. HOOKER at present. For, as he will not be rapidly read, I leave what hath been quoted from his works, to your deliberate consideration. At another opportunity, I will again avail myself of his assistance, in order to prove, that the unchurching disposition which is thus opposed, cannot, by any principle of sound reasoning, be defended,

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## LETTER VIII.

DEAR SIR,

LET me now observe, that Mr. HOOKER, after having said much of the difference between the mystical and visible church, inferred,

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“ That

\* Hooker's Works, vol. i. p. 347, 348.

“ That the VISIBLE church of Jesus Christ is ONE, in outward profession of those things which SUPERNATURALLY appertain to the very essence of christianity, and are necessarily required in every particular christian man.” He took care to add, “ But our NAMING of Jesus Christ our Lord, is not enough to prove us christians, unless we also EMBRACE that faith which Christ hath published to the world.”\*

Lower down, he reasoned thus ; “ Apparent it is, that all men are of necessity, either christians, or not christians. If, by EXTERNAL PROFESSION, they be christians, then they are of the VISIBLE church of Christ;—yea, although they be impious idolaters, wicked hereticks, persons excommunicable, yea, and cast out for notorious improbity. Such withal, we deny not to be imps and limbs of Satan, even as long as they continue such.”

Aware that this sort of reasoning might be misunderstood, Mr. HOOKE put a serious question,

\* Hooker's Works, vol. i. p. 348, 349.

question, and gave it a proper answer. " Is it then possible, that the self-same men, should belong both to the synagogue of SATAN, and to the church of Jesus Christ ?" This is the question, which is thus answered: " Unto that church which is his MYSTICAL BODY, not possible; because THAT body consisteth of none but only true Israelites, true sons of Abraham, true servants and saints of God. Howbeit, of the VISIBLE BODY and church of Jesus Christ, those may be, and often times are, in respect of the main parts of their outward profession, who, (in regard of their inward disposition of mind, yea, of external conversation, yea, even of some parts of their very profession,) are most worthily both hateful in the sight of God himself, and, in the eyes of the sounder part of the VISIBLE church, most execrable. Our Saviour therefore, compareth the kingdom of Heaven to a NET, whereunto all which cometh, neither *is*, nor *seemeth* FISH: his church he compareth unto a FIELD, where TARES, manifestly known and seen by all men, do grow intermingled with GOOD CORN; and even so shall continue till the final consummation of the world."\*

If

\* Hooker's Works, vol. i. p. 350, 351.

If these remarks are not so forcible to members of well-regulated congregational churches, as to them that prefer a national establishment, yet, every where, " For lack of diligent observing the difference, first, between the church of God MYSTICAL and VISIBLE, then, between the visible SOUND and CORRUPTED, (sometimes more, sometimes less,) the oversights are neither few nor light, that have been committed."\*

From lack of this diligent observation, or from something worse, proceedeth that uncharitable disposition which hath given birth to innumerable animosities, that have nothing more to do with christianity than to disgrace it. This evil temper ought every where to be resisted, and, by your aid, I hope to do this with some effect in my projected publication.

## LETTER

\* Hooker's Works, vol. i. p. 353.



LETTER IX.

DEAR SIR,

LEST it should be imagined, that I charge some of my acquaintance unjustly, by saying, they will not allow that the church of England is a church of Christ, I will lay before you some of their arguments for making use of this harsh assertion, and such remarks as, when corrected by you, may not be unworthy of their notice.

I. They say, the church of England is a NATIONAL church.

But in what sense is it so considered by churchmen? As a part of the mystical, or VISIBLE body of Christ? As the latter ONLY; in which they allow are both hypocrites, and impostors. Yet, even in this sense, the church of England is not of the same extent as the State. Jews, Mahometans, Deists and Atheists, may be subjects of the British Empire, but they

they cannot as such, be members of the church of England.

If the ministers of the church of England, make infants a part of the visible church of Christ, Presbyterian and Independent ministers do the same; and exercise that kind of authority over those infants they are permitted to sprinkle, which they are not willing to renounce.

When we baptize a believer at his own request, it is probable several of his friends and relations will be offended. On the contrary, when Pedobaptists sprinkle infants at the request of their parents, the children are supposed to be laid under considerable obligations to such ministers, and the household to be very well pleased with their behaviour. With these advantages attending infant baptism, would one in ten renounce it, were they to suppose it could not be logically defended?

II. They say, the church of England is established by PARLIAMENT.

What

What is this but saying, It is established by MEN; and by those men which the members of that church, judge to be the greatest and wisest men in the nation?

Now let me ask, Are not all dissenting churches established, so far as they are established, by MEN? Yes, it must be said; but by GODLY men, and by them according to the SCRIPTURES. Very good; and, Were there no GODLY men in parliament when the church of England was established first under Edward the Sixth, and afterwards in the reign of Elizabeth? and did not those godly men in that business act, in their own opinions, according to the scriptures?

But, the present objection is the more frivolous, since it is well known, nonconformists have been sufficiently fond of parliaments. Witness, that frightful period, falsely called, the Commonwealth of England. Modern nonconformists too, can, on occasion, shew their attachment to parliamentary proceedings. For, when they warmly celebrate the “ ever  
G dear

dear King William the Third, of immortal memory," Whence their profusion of praise? What did William do in favor of nonconformists, but by act of parliament?—Are not dissenters still addressing the House of Commons for further favors? and, would they not admire the present parliament, provided it would do much more for them than William the Third ever did, or was inclined to do, when he granted the Act of TOLERATION?

These are symptoms of worldly policy; lawful and right, it should seem, in us; but in others, by no means to be defended. This is not my opinion. I apprehend, that churchmen have as great a right to act according to the best of their own judgment, as ourselves. If, by so doing, they sometimes act improperly, Who doth not? Let us envy none who act amiss; nor wish for that influence which might prompt us to follow their example. If, as real christians, we are to obtain any thing of the State, that may, on the whole, be to our advantage, it must be by that kind of nonconformity



mity to THIS WORLD, which every nonconformist doth not admire.

III. They say, the King is acknowledged to be the HEAD of the church of England.

Formerly, we are told, " Divine things, being more esteemed than now, were used as helps for the countenance of secular power; the case in these latter ages is turned upside down: Earth hath now brought Heaven under foot, and, in the course of the world, hath of the two, the greater credit. PRIESTHOOD was then a strengthening to KINGS, which now is forced to take strength and credit from far meaner degrees of civil authority."\*

This is plausible reasoning; but it only applies to such PRIESTS, OR MINISTERS, that stand in need of worldly honor and revenue. Those things that are truly divine, and those persons that eminently fear God, are as illustrious when despised, as when they are esteem-

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ed.

\* Hooker's Works, vol. iii. p. 212.

ed. A truly eminent christian, is in all things instructed, both to be full, and to be hungry, both to abound, and to suffer need.\*

On the title of HEADSHIP, let us hear what hath been said. " In truth, the question is, Whether the MAGISTRATE, by being head in such a sense as WE term him, do use, or exercise, any part of that authority, not which belongeth unto CHRIST, but which other MEN ought to have."†

This question is the more serious, as in every society, there is a power under which the rest must live in subjection. Whether this power is lodged with MANY, FEW, or ONE, it is liable to be abused. Still, supremacy in power must be continued in every STATE, and in every CHURCH, since without it, there would be anarchy, confusion, and every evil work.

Among the churches commonly called Independent,

\* Phil. iv. 12.

† Hooker's Works, vol. iii. p. 318.

dependent, this power is lodged with the majority of their members, whatever may be the worth of their votes. Among Presbyterians, a kind of aristocracy prevails; but, in the final result of any question before them, the majority of the Presbyters are said to decide. In the church of England, the King is allowed to be the supreme visible head of it, Yet in what sense? not to rule according to his pleasure, but according to those well-known laws and canons that cannot be altered without the advice of his Majesty's privy council, and the deliberate decision of parliament.

Whoever attends to these things, and to the settled service of the church of England, and hath seen his Majesty going through that solemn devotion, must be convinced, that by calling him the HEAD of that church, no incroachment on the HEADSHIP of Christ was intended by the bishops, or accepted by the King.—“Not in the communication of names, but in the confusion of things, there is error.”\*

For

For my own part, I wish the terms **HEAD** of the **CHURCH**, had never been applied to any King; but, how a man of sense and candor, can credit such tragical stories, as some have believed on this subject, without foundation, surpasseth my conception.

The King is not said to be the head of any reformed church, but the church of England, and the power which that church ascribeth to his Majesty, “differeth in three things plainly from that which Christ doth challenge.” First, it differeth in **ORDER**. Secondly, in **MEASURE** of power. Thirdly, in the very **KIND** of his power.”—If you consult at your leisure, **HOOKER**, under the article of **HEADSHIP**, in the third volume of his works, you will find these things explained, and much more that is worth your notice.

IV. They whose arguments I oppose, have so much to say of the **LITURGY** of the church of England, as if that alone was sufficient to prove that church is not a church of Christ.

On



On this subject, I blush for them who must know, that LITURGIES are of great antiquity in the visible church of Christ, and who also, must admit, that the Liturgy of the church of England, is equal to any other they are able to produce. But, I do somewhat more than blush, when I recollect, that nonconformists themselves, have more than once *pleaded* for Liturgies, and more than once PUBLISHED Liturgies of their own.

At the Savoy Conference, they not only owned the lawfulness of a prescribed form of public worship; but desired, that some learned, pious, and moderate divines, of both sorts, might be employed, either to compile a NEW LITURGY, or to reform the OLD; *adding* some other FORMS in scripture phrase, to be used at the minister's choice.\*

They who are most vehement against LITURGIES, consider an aversion to them as "a standing criterion" to judge who are nonconformists.

\* Noncon's Mem. Introd. p. 21.

formists. Yet, it hath been noticed, that these gentlemen themselves, are formalists in their public prayers, and have no objection to call their own worship, however formal, political, or miscellaneous it may be, " DIVINE SERVICE."

If you are not weary of such arguments\* as I have attempted to refute in this letter, others, of the same sort, and not a few in number, may be found in Mr. Towgood's Dissent from the Church of England fully Justified. If you have the sixth edition of that book, you are in possession of the smartest and severest things that have been said against the established church. But that either Mr. Towgood hath been of much service to the best interests of dissenters, or Dr. South to the best interests of churchmen, by their fierce and partial contentions, who is able to prove?

## LETTER

\* I once thought of adding another, viz. That the church of England still is a persecuting church: but that argument and my answer, is reserved for a more convenient opportunity.

## LETTER X.

DEAR SIR,

WHEN a man hath formed any religious opinions for himself, tried their value, and found them on repeated trial, worth his notice; it giveth him pleasure to discover the same sentiments in authors of undoubted reputation. This pleasure I have often enjoyed, by a careful attention to the learned and pious labors both of churchmen and dissenters.

You have had my opinion of Mr. HOOKER, and also those quotations from his works, that will justify my regard for that great man. Let me now introduce to your notice, one of the ejected ministers, who had as sound notions of christianity as Mr. HOOKER, and more moderate ideas of an established church. I now speak of Mr. SAMUEL SHAW, author of a well-known book called IMMANUEL; and of a book not so well known, called THE TRUE CHRIS-

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**TIANS TEST, or a Discovery of the Love and Lovers of the World.**

In the second part of this book, his meditations on nonconformists and conformists have long since imparted to me instruction. As this book is rarely to be met with, I will give you a specimen of his piety and good sense in it, which are sure to obtain your approbation.

After lamenting the difficulties that had been raised in this nation, and the disagreements that subsisted here between conformists and nonconformists, he says, " Possibly, amongst the one and the other, there may be found some that are lovers of the world more than of God." He adds, " I will endeavor to separate these, the vile from the precious : and then, as for the sincere lovers of God, of what persuasions soever, they will be sure to escape at the last, though it should be as by fire."\*

He divides nonconformists as our Saviour  
did

\* Shaw's True Christians Test, p. 263.



did his Eunuchs into three sorts. " First, such as have made themselves Eunuchs for the kingdom of Heaven's sake. Secondly, such as are born Eunuchs. Thirdly, such as are made Eunuchs of men." By which we are to understand, " NONCONFORMISTS out of judgment, by virtue of education, or out of some worldly respects, or carnal principle."

The first sort, doth not fall under his censure as lovers of the world. The second sort, he thinks might be warped by prejudice, before they could judge of things that differ. But to the third sort of nonconformists, whom he supposeth, are acted as carnal men, by obstinate humor, or worldly interest, he thus reproveth :

" I beseech you, Sirs, lay it to heart ; whosoever prefers ease or honor, popular esteem, the good opinion of a party, or an opportunity of making himself and his name great, before unity and order, before the peace and settlement of the church, yea, or before his liberty and capacity of ministring in holy things, and propagating the gospel of Christ, is so far carnal, and a lover of the world."

“ Faction and schism, and sedition, are works of the flesh, as well as flatteries, and bare compliance.—The propagation of a party, and the advancement of a name, are a part of the world, as well as fat benefices : and where they are preferred before peace and charity, do denominate a man a lover of the world, as well as those where they are preferred before truth : for God is peace and love, as well as truth.”

“ To run away from ceremonial uncleanness, and at the same time to run into moral ; to be shy of white garments, and yet free to entertain black passions ; to avoid the sign of the cross, and yet to live in the spirit of crossness and contradiction, is as foolish, as to be frightened at an apparition of a devil, and yet confidently to follow a real one in all his works, as most men do : and it is so much the more foolish, as it adds hypocrisy to folly.”\*

So much for nonconformists by Mr. Shaw ; who speaks in the same impartial manner of  
con-

\* Shaw's True Christians Test, p. 265, 266.

conformists, in his True Christians Test. He says, "As nonconformity, with all its pretences of purity, truth and simplicity, will not justify the humorous, or schismatical nonconformist, so neither will the regularity, peaceableness, and decency of conformity, justify the carnal and ill-principled conformist; no more than the honorableness of marriage, will justify them that go together like beasts."\*

Mr. Shaw apprehended there were three sorts of conformists; some out of conscience; some out of carelessness; and some out of covetousness. By conscientious conformists, Mr. Shaw meant, "Such as think that way in its own nature the best, and do in their judgment choose it, and think it reasonable to impose it; and such as are only persuaded in their consciences that it is not evil, and that it is best, for peace sake, to submit to it." Having said this, he adds, "I see plainly, that all good mens consciences are not of one size; and I know no one below the Omniscient, that can exactly take measure of them.

Both

\* Shaw's True Christians Test, p. 267.

Both these, therefore, I leave to the judge of consciences."

But to them that conform out of carelessness, or from a covetous disposition, Mr. Shaw is laudably severe. He says, " However they may glory in their conformity, yet sure the CHURCH hath no cause to glory in them; for they are but a company of prest soldiers, and will either be easily routed, or run away. These love the world more than truth, which they take no pains to discover; and (more than) the peace of their consciences, which they take no care to preserve. The careless prefer the custom and example of men, before right reason, judgment and conscience; and though they should chance to hit of the right, yet they act wrongly. The covetous prefer the bread of priests, before the priest's office, with the degenerate posterity of Eli."\*

" Whether," continueth Mr. Shaw, " the careless, or the covetous, are more excusable, it

\* 1 Sam. ii. 36.



it matters not, in a case where both are inexcusable. But this is plain, that where a doubt lies between truth and falsehood, he that admits worldly interest for an umpire to decide the controversy, is a lover of the world; and if worldly considerations be the predominant motives, let the matter he embraces be never so true, he is false to his God and his own conscience in embracing it. The profession of the gospel is a good thing, and yet the professors of it that are acted by a carnal principle, are nevertheless bad men."\*

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## LETTER XI.

DEAR SIR,

WHAT I have sent you from Mr. HOOKER, and from Mr. SHAW, sheweth, that eminent piety may be found, both in and out of the church

\* Shaw's True Christians Test, p. 267, 269.

church of England. Had these two good men lived at the same time, and in the same country, they would have known and loved each other; and have seen, without jealousy, how much they were esteemed by men of understanding.

The advantages that such men have over inferior characters, seem to be considerable, and to be more than a balance to their peculiar discouragements. I have long thought, that a man of sense, faith, and virtue, (which no man is, but by the grace of God,) might laugh at every kind of opposition on earth, but that which is corporal, and of necessity grievous.—Such a man, in my opinion, is friendly to all men, and afraid of no man. He coveteth no honors it would disgrace his betters to bestow, nor will accept of any office he cannot obtain without guile, and manage without disgrace. He hath no wish to be the leader of any party, nor will he be led blindfold by any leading man. He knoweth, that under the profession of the christian religion, in every branch of it, there are weak and worthless creatures, and that

that real christians, notwithstanding, are, wherever they may be found, the excellent of the earth, with whom he wisheth to live and die, whatever may be their lot beneath the sun. He knoweth, that members of the mystical church of Christ may be found in a thousand different places in England, and elsewhere, but no where altogether. He knoweth, that wicked men of good abilities, are employed in all governments, and that the Saints are not yet qualified, or inclined, to govern the earth. He knoweth, that real religion teaches its possessors to revere, in a proper manner, the civil governors which God hath set over them in this transitory state. He knoweth, it teaches them patiently to bear that yoke which unbelievers and misbelievers cannot endure; and to avoid those murmurs and complaints against administration, which commonly spring from ignorant conjectures, or from evil dispositions. He knoweth, that his own lot in life, is under divine appointment, and that it is his greatest business in that very lot to glorify God. He knoweth, whatever may be his endeavors and exertions to do good, he can never succeed, but so far as it pleaseth

God to grant his blessing ; and he also knoweth, that when unsuccessful, his labor of love is not forgotten. — This wholesome knowledge, and the price he setteth upon it, is to him of singular service ; it will not suffer him to be much imposed upon by others, nor permit him to impose on any ; it will not give him leave to be idle, nor to be uselessly employed ; it will not allow him to be the slave of any party, but guides him, as he hath opportunity, to do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. — Such a man, wherever he may be found, is a man of God. Such a man would I be myself, much rather than be the most dignified, learned, and popular preacher in the kingdom.

“ Let me speak freely ; all pomp of worship, all speculative knowledge, though never so orthodox, is as dear to the animal life as the divine : and all external models of devotion, submiss confessions, devout hymns, pathetic prayers, raptures of joy, much zeal to reform indecencies in worship, or superstitions, a fierce raging against the political antichrist, do as well agree to a natural man as a spiritual •



a spiritual, and may be as fairly acted over to see to, by a mere selfish carnal principle, as by that which is truly divine."\*

All this I believe; and am more and more of opinion, that " Fanaticism and a spirit of domination are the two most dangerous enemies of religion. They often combine their powers, and while they strive to destroy it, act seemingly by a principle of zeal for its purity."† I think also, " That that man hath most of God's spirit in him, who upon religious matters reasons with most penetration and exactness, and who leads the most virtuous life."‡

Let me, however, not be misunderstood. I speak not of virtue as the rival, but as the result of faith. For, " Faith is not only a means of obeying, but a principal act of obedience: it is not only a needful foundation; it is not only an altar, on which to sacrifice; but it is a sacrifice itself; and, perhaps of all the greatest."§

Believe

\* Shaw's Immanuel, preface, p. 36.

† Essay on Fanaticism, addressed to the people of his own persuasion, by the Rev. John Stinstra, a MENNONITE.

‡ The same Essay.

§ Dr. Young's Centaur not Fabulous, p. 13.

Believe me, Sir, as I have not in this letter, or in any other, said any thing of virtue or morality, to oppose the necessity of sound belief in Jesus Christ, without which no man hath a well grounded hope of salvation, so neither have I said any thing at all that you should form an extravagant notion of my own virtue and morality. No, Sir, I have not written in this manner, "As though I had already attained, or were already perfect:" far from it! "but, I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."

I have now sent you all I intended on the subject of nonconformity; and wait, in patient expectation, for your corrections and advice; by which, if it be not my own fault, my Essay on that subject, will be greatly improved.



P. 17, L. 4, read temporal.

18, 10, read promising.

21, 16, read were.

30, 20, read TEMPLE.

J. BARFIELD, Printer, Wardour-Street, Soho.

